

**INDIANA FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT
PRO BONO COMMITTEE, INC.**

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Plan Administrator**

TO: ALL NEWS MEDIA

DATE: August 18, 2006

VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS TO BE HONORED

Courtrooms can be beautiful and awesome places...filled with ancient wood paneling, high ceilings, church-like pews, and a railing between the pews and the judge's bench not unlike the communion railing in many worship spaces. But for a person facing eviction of their children from the only home they've ever known, or, worse yet, loss of custody of those same children, or facing an abusive spouse and baffled by the mysteries of divorce, marital property settlements, "child support worksheets" or "parenting time guidelines", walking into those beautiful spaces when they are filled with other litigants, bailiffs, attorneys, and a judge in a black robe can be a very intimidating, even terrifying experience. Trying to deal with such a situation unassisted by an attorney can be more than frightening. It can be disastrous.

Unfortunately, for thousands of households in Northwest Indiana, after the rent and NIPSCO bills are paid, groceries purchased, and enough gas put in the car to make it to a minimum wage job, there's no money left to retain an attorney no matter how worthy their cause.

Luckily, in the past year 344 such individuals and a few not-for-profit charitable organizations from Lake, Porter, LaPorte, Jasper, Newton, Pulaski and Starke Counties didn't have to walk that walk or talk that talk without the help of a lawyer. Through the generosity of 241 lawyers who volunteered through the First Judicial District Pro Bono Committee these folks did and do have an attorney. In fact in the past twelve months

they received free legal assistance whose total hourly value exceeded \$365,000 dollars, or an average of over a thousand dollars each.

On August 29th, at a pre-game dinner and ceremonies at Bennigans Restaurant, Gary, prior to the Railcats vs. Schaumburg Flyers Game, the Committee will thank all of the volunteers and especially honor eleven lawyers who donated between 57 and 192 hours of free legal services, far exceeding the annual aspirational goal of 50 hours of pro bono work set by the Indiana State Bar Association and the Indiana Supreme Court for Indiana attorneys: J. Douglas Angel, Munster; Laura Bottando, Hobart; Richard Busse, Valparaiso; Richard Comingore, Rensselaer; Christopher Cooper, Chicago; Julie Glade, Merrillville; C. Jerome Smith, Hammond; and James McCafferty, Merrillville. Together they provided 990 hours of free services, conservatively valued at over \$148,500.

Also to be honored is Lake Superior Court Judge Wm. E. Davis, immediate past chair of the First District Committee, who will receive the prestigious "Richard P. Komyatte 'Access to Justice 'Award" given to recognize Northwest Indiana attorneys or judges who provide outstanding leadership in insuring meaningful access to our justice system. Past recipients of the award have been Attorneys C. Jerome Smith, Wm. T. Enslin, Paul Leonard Jr., John Dull, R. Cordell Funk, and the late Timothy Galvin.

The attorneys will also remember the late Nancy Kelly, Gary, a long-time advocate for low-income persons, who served on the Committee since its inception and also as a member of the state-wide Indiana Legal Services Board of Directors, the Northwest Indiana Client Counsel, and numerous other organizations concerned with the needs of the poor.

Fort Wayne Senior Judge Wm. Lee of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, and Chair of the Indiana Pro Bono Commission will preside over the

ceremonies. The Railcats have also invited him to throw out the ceremonial first pitch at following the ceremonies and lead the 7th Inning stretch.

The 2005-06 First District attorney volunteers not only provided legal representation as lawyers, they also volunteered to be Guardians ad litem for children caught up in litigation and as mediators in civil and family matters.

The legal issues faced by the clients whom they helped varied widely. In some instances all they needed was an in depth consultation and legal advice, a Power of Attorney, a simple will or change of title. But the lawyers also assisted not-for-profit organizations to incorporate and obtain federal tax exempt status. They helped Individuals with overwhelming debt from serious illness, often elderly, to stop harassment by creditors and to file a consumer bankruptcy, even with the additional steps required by last year's bankruptcy "reforms".

Volunteer lawyers assisted victims of predatory lending and other shoddy consumer scams, obtained hardship driver's licenses, guardianships over minor children, or return of rental security deposits . They provided long term representation to determine the best interests of children, restore co-parenting time, providing financial support for the battered spouse and his or her children. They mediated property settlements and parenting time arrangement, often laying the foundation for amicable interaction long after a marriage has ended.

The First District Committee was established in 2001 by the Indiana Supreme Court as part of a state-wide effort to involve the private bar in insuring that our national motto, "Justice for All" really means "All", regardless of financial circumstances. The Committee, through its Plan Administrator, Attorney Judy Stanton, screens clients for eligibility and then matches them up with an appropriate volunteer. Eligibility is limited to households whose gross income is less than 125% of federal poverty level, 150% for persons 65 and over.

The Committee's current chair, appointed by the Indiana Supreme Court, is Lake Superior Court Judge Robert A. Pete. Other officers are Paul A. Leonard, Jr., co-chair, Barbara J. Schmidt, Vice-chair, Cassandra Hine, Secretary, and Reva Hill, Treasurer. Members include Circuit Court Judges Lorenzo Arredondo, Lake County, J. Phillip McGraw, Jasper County, and Superior Court Judge Patrick Blankenship, Pulaski County, Lake County attorneys Komyatte, Enslen, Rehana Adat, Stephen Rodriguez, and M. Elizabeth Flores, Don Evans, Porter County, Kevin McGrath, LaPorte County, and Linda Harris, Newton County, along with Kenneth Flanagan, Executive Director, Catholic Charities, Tim Cottingham, Executive Director, Greater Hammond Community Services, and client representative John Downes.

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For additional information or questions please contact Attorney Stanton at the above office.